



Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)

# **Making Your Grant Proposal Competitive**





# Overview



- This presentation is a general resource that provides best practices to strengthen your grant proposal for the Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA).
- All information needed to prepare a competitive proposal is contained within the solicitation documents; **be sure to read the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) and all related documents thoroughly** before writing your proposal.
- Throughout this presentation, and in all related documents about the ECA Grant process, the term “grant” refers to both grants and cooperative agreements.



# ECA Overview



## BUREAU OF EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

### Mission Statement

To increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange that assist in the development of peaceful relations.

**1 million+**

total ECA program alumni

Including 75+ Nobel Laureates and  
450 heads of state and government

**2,000+**

programs from the past 3 years

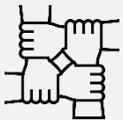
Engaging 155 countries and  
participants from 47 states and DC



# Eligibility Requirements



## ECA provides grants to U.S. organizations:



✓ Non-profit organizations



✓ Cultural institutions



✓ Educational institutions

## ECA does NOT provide grants to:



✗ Individuals



✗ For-profit institutions



✗ Unsolicited grant proposals

## Applicants must meet the provisions of a 501c3 at time of application

To be eligible for \$130,000+ in funding, you must demonstrate:

- ① Organization has been in existence for 4+ years, and
- ② 4+ years of experience conducting international exchanges



# Review Criteria



- All technically eligible applications will be competitively reviewed according to the criteria stated in the NOFO. These criteria all carry equal weight in the proposal review.
- Make sure your narrative addresses each of the review criteria published in the NOFO.
- Reference the NOFO for detailed descriptions of the review criteria.
- *Note: the review criteria listed here are frequently used but may vary in title or description depending on the solicitation and are subject to change.*

## Common Review Criteria:



Support of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)



Performance Monitoring and Evaluation



Budget and Cost-Effectiveness



Project Planning / Ability to Achieve Program Objectives



Follow-on Activities



# Review Criteria Guidance



**Support of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI):** demonstrate how your organization advances the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) - this encompasses diversity in terms of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, geographic origin, socio-economic status, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Do not simply state that your organization supports diversity, but rather think carefully about how the different elements of your program reflect and advance DEI.



**Performance Monitoring and Evaluation:** ensure project evaluation plans are specific to the NOFO and specify when and how evaluation will take place. You may be asked to include a performance monitoring plan that outlines team responsibilities and the mechanism(s) through which data collection will be administered.



**Budget and Cost-Effectiveness:** ensure your budget and budget narrative meet all budgetary requirements in the NOFO and PSI and support the program as proposed. Ensure cost sharing is fully verifiable according to federal regulations.



**Project Planning / Ability to Achieve Program Objectives:** explain how you will undertake the necessary tasks to fulfill the project's goals (including but not limited to participant selection, placement, and monitoring).



**Follow-on Activities:** demonstrate how your program will continue and how you will engage program participants after Federal support has ended.



# Tips for a Strong Proposal (1/2)



## Make sure to:

-  ✓ Carefully read all solicitation documents before writing your proposal (NOFO, PSI, & other attachments)
-  ✓ Review the stated goals and objectives of the program- if they complement your organization's goals and objectives, explain why and how your proposed program design would benefit the DoS
-  ✓ Show how your approach would benefit people both in the United States and abroad
-  ✓ Demonstrate your organization's unique approach when you address the program objectives and goals; demonstrate your commitment and enthusiasm
-  ✓ Explain how your organization managed challenges in past exchange programs and the outcomes you achieved as a result; being honest about lessons learned from past exchange experience strengthens your application by demonstrating your expertise and ability to overcome obstacles
-  ✓ If a competition is specific to a geographical region or program theme, highlight your institutional and staff expertise in that region and/or with that theme
-  ✓ If your organization cannot demonstrate a four-year track record in conducting international exchanges or lacks expertise with a specific type of exchange or component of the program, consider partnering with another organization— bring in a sub-awardee or become a sub-awardee
-  ✓ Address each of the review criteria stated in the NOFO and be specific in your response



# Tips for a Strong Proposal (2/2)

## Do NOT:



✗ Use vague descriptions- identify and address all required program components in the NOFO (these may include orientation plans, proposed agendas, sample schedules, sample promotional materials, sample surveys, and letters of endorsement)



✗ Rely on a generic application—tailor your proposal to the specific NOFO



✗ Forget to proofread—before you submit have someone outside your team review and proofread to avoid grammar mistakes and other issues



✗ Submit your proposal at the last minute—technical difficulties during submission may arise and late submissions will not be reviewed



✗ Be discouraged if you do not receive funding. Remember that funding for ECA grant competitions is limited—if your proposal is not funded, the ECA program office can provide you with a briefing on your proposal's strengths and potential areas of improvement; many applicants who do not receive funding are successful in subsequent competitions after incorporating ECA feedback



# Budget Tips



Make sure your budget submission:

- ① Is clear
- ② Is specific
- ③ Adds up correctly

Reference the NOFO for detailed budget guidance

Ensure there is alignment between the budget and budget narrative

The budget narrative should:

- Include all line items
- Justify each cost outlined in the budget
- Explain how you calculated the amount

If you propose cost-sharing, ensure it is fully verifiable according to federal regulations



# Submission Checklist



Before submitting your proposal make sure to include these **required elements**:

- ✓ Executive summary and proposal narrative
- ✓ Proposal budget and budget narrative per Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) guidelines and Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI)
- ✓ Required application forms: SF-424 “Application for Federal Assistance”, SF-424A “Budget Information – Non-construction Programs”
- ✓ Other attachments, if applicable, such as the: SF-424B “Assurances– Non-construction Programs,” Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA), form 990 Return of Organization Exempt From Income Tax, SF-LLL Disclosure of Lobbying Activities

Also check the NOFO for **additional requirements**, which may include:

- Current resumes
- Letters of endorsement
- Sample materials
- Demonstration of previous exchange experience

This is not a comprehensive list– **reference the NOFO for specific submission guidance**



# Questions?



- For more information, visit <https://eca.state.gov/organizational-funding>.
- Please direct any additional questions to the ECA Program Officer or point of contact identified in the NOFO.
- Once the NOFO has closed, ECA will begin the review process. This process takes time—you may not hear from ECA in the months following your submission. You will receive notification on the status of your application once ECA has reached a decision.

**Thank you- we look forward to receiving your proposal!**